

the Beggar's Opera

A game by Jason Morningstar inspired by John Gay's comic play

Seven players, each taking a prominent role in the original story. Beside the Beggar, who serves a special purpose, each character has an ultimate goal that revolves in some way around the fate of the ne'er-do-well Macheath.

The person playing the Beggar will actually tell the tale created by the other six players. The game is played across five days in London in the spring of 1728. The Beggar may call on other players to act out scenes at his direction, as he wishes. It should be framed as his memory of events, as told to a younger, more callow generation.

Each character has five possible actions and his player chooses one for each day. These should be written on index cards. Some of the actions can only be used once, and some can be used as often as desired. They are chosen simultaneously. Table talk is encouraged, although it is poor form to use this to explicitly collaborate.

After they are chosen but before the action cards are revealed, Macheath's player (if he ended the previous day not in hiding or in jail) may choose any other player's card to look at and then revise his choice, if desired.

The six revealed cards sketch out the events of the day, and they are shown to the Beggar's player only – no other player should know what was chosen. The Beggar's job is to turn these into a coherent and entertaining story. There are some rules:

1. Anyone who is called on to assist will not perform their stated action. They will, instead, help somebody else and provide color.
2. Any external group called on to defend Macheath will prevent any harm coming to him.
3. The Beggar may discretely inquire about the target of a killing, perhaps with some ominous glances and finger-pointing.
4. An attempted killing is settled with a best-of-three rock/paper/scissors match between the two parties, with color commentary between each round by The Beggar. The attacker is never harmed. If two people desire to kill the same person simultaneously, that person simply dies.
5. The Beggar's player retains any one-time use cards and hands the others back.

The game ends after five days or with the death of Macheath. That's it. *Finis*.

Father, dear Johnny 'turn your Eyes
Bestow one glance to cheer me
Think that with Grief your Polly dies
Unless you still will hear me.

But can I leave my pretty lussy
Without one tear or tender sigh,
Unlitt I heard Signora Tussey
She charm'd my ear and pleas'd my eye

If a Woman should pout
(As she will there's no doubt)
Tho her rivals as meek as a Lamb
In lieu of a Pill
The quelling draught is a dram.



Macheath, *a villain,*

who wants to be free and unattached.

- Can hide with his gang on Bagshot Heath (whenever desired)
- Can call on his gang to defend him (once)
- Can hide among the Women of the Town in Vinegar Yard (once)
- Can call on the Women of the Town to defend him (once)
- Can attempt to kill anyone (once)

*Write your chosen action each day on an index card
and give it to the player of The beggar.*

A Beggar, *a teller of tales,*

who wants to entertain.

- You will actually tell the tale created by the other six players. The game is played across five days in London in the spring of 1728. You may call on other players to act out scenes at his direction, as he wishes. It should be framed as his memory of events, as told to a younger, more callow generation.
- The other players will choose cards and give them to you. Your job is to turn these into a coherent and entertaining story.
- You may, as necessary, discretely inquire about the target of a killing, perhaps with some ominous glances and finger-pointing.
- You retain any one-time use cards and hands the others back.

Lockit, *the jailer,*

in Mr. Peacham's pocket, wants Macheath to hang.

- Can capture Macheath and throw him in jail, if his location is known (whenever desired)
- Can hang Macheath, if he is in jail (whenever desired)
- Can confine his daughter Lucy (once)
- Can call on Peachum to assist him (once)
- Can force a Lady of the Town to betray Macheath (once)

*Write your chosen action each day on an index card
and give it to the player of The beggar.*

Lucy Lockit, *the jailer's daughter,*

*engaged to Macheath and five months pregnant,
wants to poison Polly and marry Macheath.*

- Can call on her father to assist her (whenever desired)
- Can attempt to kill Polly (whenever desired)
- Can attempt to kill any man (once)
- Can marry Macheath, despite everything (once)
- Can find Macheath, no matter where he is hiding (once)

*Write your chosen action each day on an index card
and give it to the player of The beggar.*

Peachum,
fence & thief-catcher,

who wants Macheath to hang.

- Can force Lockit to assist him (whenever desired)
- Can capture Macheath and throw him in jail, if his location is known (whenever desired)
- Can confine his daughter Polly (once)
- Can trick Macheath into the open (once)
- Can bribe a member of Macheath's gang to betray him (once)

*Write your chosen action each day on an index card
and give it to the player of The beggar.*

Mrs. Peachum,
Peachum's wife,

wishes to murder Macheath for his fortune.

- Can call on Peachum to assist her (whenever desired)
- Can call on the Women of the Town to betray Macheath (once)
- Can call on Polly to assist her (whenever desired)
- Can seduce Lockit and force him to assist her (once)
- Can attempt to kill Macheath (once)

*Write your chosen action each day on an index card
and give it to the player of The beggar.*

Polly Peachum,
Peachum's daughter,

*lately married to Macheath, wants to live happily
with her husband.*

- Can hide Macheath in Peachum's house (whenever desired)
- Can find Macheath, no matter where he is hiding (whenever desired)
- Can attempt to kill a Lockit family member (once)
- Can free Macheath from jail (once)
- Can save Macheath from certain death when all else has failed (once)

Coves & Culls,
people of the town,

dubious friends of Macheath for all to employ.

- Macheath's Gang: Filch, Jemmy Twitcher, Crook-Finger'd Jack, Wat Dreary, Robin of Bagshot, Nimming Ned, Harry Paddington, Matt of the Mint & Ben Budge
- Women of the Town: Diana Trapes, Mrs. Coaxer, Dolly Trull, Betty Doxy, Jenny Diver, Mrs. Slammekin, Sukey Tawdrey, Mrs. Vixen & Molly Brazen